

THE PSYCHO-SOCIAL FACTORS OF ADOLESCENT RUNAWAY:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR SERVICE

A THESIS  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR  
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

BY  
ELIZABETH MARIE FELTON

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

APRIL 1989

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ABSTRACT

SOCIAL WORK

FELTON, ELIZABETH MARIE

B.S.W. STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE AT BUFFALO

PSYCHO-SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT OF ADOLESCENT RUNAWAY:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR SERVICE

Advisor: Professor Naomi T. Ward

Thesis dated: April, 1989

The overall objective of this study was to examine the psycho-social adjustment of adolescent runaways. To attain this objective, psycho-social adjustment in the following areas of family relations, peer relations, school, self-concept, and coping skills were addressed by the researcher. A causal comparative research design was employed in the study. A self-administered questionnaire was distributed to male and female adolescents in a runaway shelter and a youth center, both located in the Atlanta Metropolitan area. The questionnaire was also administered to non-runaway adolescents at Towers High School in DeKalb County.

The study was an attempt to provide a better understanding of the incidence of runaway behavior among adolescents in relation to school, self-concept, family relations, peer relations, and coping skills in an effort to be more aware of the factors associated



with adolescents decision to run, in order to better help this troubled population.

The findings of this research indicate that there was a significant difference between runaways and non-runaways in the area of peer relations. It is also noted that there were specific items within the other categories where there was a significance between the two groups.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writer wishes to thank Professor Naomi T. Ward for all her time, patience, and dedication she has extended her during this study. Gratitude is also extended to Dr. Amos Ajo for his assistance with this research. The writer further expresses her appreciation to Hakim S. Sabur for being supportive, understanding, and offering help when it was most needed. Lastly, the writer expresses her sincere thanks to her family, who have given her constant faith and encouragement. In recognition and appreciation, this thesis is dedicated to these persons, without whom this study would not have been possible

E.M.F.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Youth in America have experienced a magnitude of problems that are manifested through exhibiting various behaviors, one of which is running away from their homes. This study is concerned with understanding the incidence of adolescent runaway through the examination of psycho-social factors surrounding the issue.

Running away is more than a century old problem. Running away from home has a long tradition in America. It played an important role in the settlement of the Western frontier and has been captured in Mark Twain's classic HUCK FINN (Garbarino, 1986). Even though running away from home has been around since the settlement of the Western frontier, the factors surrounding the incidence of adolescent runaway still have not been understood completely. To further understand the psychosocial factors as they relate to this issue, one must look at the historical development of this phenomenon and responses to the problem through the development of legislation and programs.

## Historical Perspective

Adolescent runaways were perceived as an important national problem in the Depression of the 1930's, but with World War II, the problem became less apparent as the war effort employed the labor of women and juveniles (Miller, 1980). Runaway behavior was not perceived as important in the 1940's because society's attention was shifted to the war. In the 1940's and 1950's, there was little research done on the runaway population, even though the problem continued to exist.

The 1960's brought another phenomena with large scale exodus of youths from home, along with the birth of the so called "hippy" or youth culture, and the increase in juvenile crime, drug use and delinquency (Miller, 1980). Another occurrence of the 1960's was the Vietnam War. D'Angelo (1987) indicates that runaway youths became a common phenomenon during the stressful Vietnam era when youth activities were fueled by the antiwar and anti-establishment exhortations of the counterculture movement.

In the 1960's and 1970's, thousands of anti-war adolescents congregated in large cities, such as,

Boston, New York, Washington, D.C., and San Francisco coming face-to-face with millions of Americans through television coverage of their sit-ins and protests. For the first time, it was acknowledged that not only the poor and dispossessed were involved, but the "middle class" youth as well. This led to a redefinition of runaways as not just delinquents (Miller, 1980).

As this problem increased, more attention was drawn to who constituted the runaway population. Thus, in the 1980's, demographic information was developed in the areas of sex, age, ethnicity, school, and region.

In 1982, the General Accounting Office reported that 45,000 runaways were served in federally supported centers (D'Angelo, 1987). Of this number, 56.7 percent were female and 43.3 percent were males, with females outnumbering males in all age groups except 12 year olds and 16 year olds. The average age of runaways was 15.1 years for females and 15.5 years for males. The racial-ethnic breakdown of runaways was 70 percent white, 18.7 percent black, 7.2 percent Hispanic, 1.8 percent American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 1.5 percent Asian or Pacific Islanders. Black and Hispanic runaways incur greater risks on the road than do their

white peers. An Ohio study group reported that black youths are more likely to be institutionalized if they encounter law officials. Racial minorities often do not feel secure about finding shelter among the dominant white population (D'Angelo, 1987).

As school status was reviewed, 8 percent of runaway youth had been truant, 17 percent had dropped out of school, 5 percent had been suspended, 69 percent were enrolled, and 1 percent completed high school. In relation to location, the findings for residential proximity were that 70 percent lived in the same county of the shelter, 16 percent lived in the same state, and 10 percent lived in other states. More runaways came from cities and suburbs than from rural areas. The regional distribution figures showed the highest rates of flight in the northern Rocky Mountain states and Midwest, with the lowest rates (but higher in volume) reported in the Northeast and Southeast (D'Angelo, 1987).

Even with these demographics it was and still is difficult to accurately determine the number of young people who run away. One reason is that there are different ways of defining runaways, which results in



reporting methods that vary when using the redefinition (Burgess, 1986). A runaway is defined as a " young person between the ages of 12-17, who leaves home with intention of running away, stays for more than 48 hours without parental permission, and knows that he or she will be missed" (Brennan et al., 1978). Prior to 1978, runaway was defined as criminal and delinquent. In addition to changes in the definition, there is a scarcity of information about runaways who are reported missing by their families or who do not use any of the resources for runaways, such as shelters (Burgess, 1986). Furthermore, there are different ways of counting runaways who return after leaving or who runaway repeatedly (Burgess, 1986). For example, one child who has run away three times in one year may be counted as three runaway children instead of three runaway incidents of one youth. These problems point out the need for a national, uniform, centralized system for collecting information about runaways (Burgess, 1986).

### Legislation and Programs

Researchers and government agencies have attempted to estimate the number of runaway youths to determine the incidence of runaway and missing children. Runaway rates range from 1.7 percent to 2.06 percent for youths between 10 and 17 years old (Burgess, 1986). The rates represents a range of 700,000 to almost one million runaways per year (Burgess, 1986). As the problem continued to escalate during the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's, it is noted that as early as 1974, attention was given by the government to this problem with the enactment of legislation and the development of programs. Because of the large numbers of runaways in the 1960's and 1970's, laws were enacted to intervene to address the problem. The federal government passed the Runaway Youth Act--Title III of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 (P.L. 93-0415) (D'Angelo, 1987). This act provided funding for housing facilities, maintenance and counseling services, and research into conditions affecting this vulnerable population. It represented the first federal legislation aimed specifically at runaways (D'Angelo, 1982).

Through the enactment of legislation, a number of programs were established to deal with the needs of this population. Runaway shelters for troubled youth exist in several communities through the country, A significant number of which received federal funding through the Youth Development Bureau within the Department of Health and Human Service. This department administers the Runaway Youth Act which was enacted into law in 1974 (Weisberg, 1985). These shelters provide crisis counseling and emergency shelter, and most offer additional services, such as medical services, vocational training, and hotlines. Weisberg (1985) further indicates that many of these shelters provide crisis counseling not only for the adolescent but also for parents and the entire family.

Running away in the United States is considered a status offense. Status offenses, as distinct from juvenile delinquency offenses, are offenses which are illegal only when committed by a juvenile (Roberts, 1981). Therefore, it is thought that to be a runaway is to be criminal, deviant, or "bad". Labeling runaways as "bad kids" shifts attention away from what

the child is trying to escape--home life. By dismissing the runaway's behaving as delinquent, there is a failure to consider what the act of running away tells about personal conflicts or family environment (Burgess, 1986).

The runaway youth population is not homogenous. There is no "typical" runaway or homeless youth. The runaway population ranges from ages 12-17 and consists of male, female, white, black, Hispanic, Asian, urban, and rural youth from every socio-economic class and state in the country (Department of Health and Human Services, 1978). "The street youths of today are not analagous to the Tom Sawyer of the past" (Luna, 1987, p. 4).

The adolescents are not seeking adventure nor are they looking for economic opportunity. Luna (1987) suggest that, contrary to a perception of the runaway as adolescent adventurers, most leave home due to far more serious reasons.

The study of such a complex social problem as adolescent runaway requires an examination of the presenting attitudes and social and psychological

factors influencing it in order to gain a greater level of understanding. If only a limited amount of information is known about adolescent runaway, there can be a problem with understanding the psychosocial factors that impact these youths, that may result in their running away.

#### Statement of the Problem

Runaway behavior continues to be a major problem among youth in the United States. According to Young, Godfrey, Matthews, & Adams (1983), the frequency and extent of runaway instances during adolescence has gained recognition as a significant and growing social problem. Historical accounts of youths leaving home remind us that running away is not a new phenomenon. This teenage enigmas has recently grown to crisis proportions and thus has become a significant social issue. Running away is a problem (actual or potential) common to many, if not most, adolescents today and cannot be viewed as isolated (Miller, 1980). There is a widespread concern regarding the alarming number of adolescents who are leaving home without parental permission.

There is not a clear understanding regarding several factors that impact runaway adolescents that may result in their running away. The problem of psycho-social adjustment in relation to a range of social-psychological factors regarding difficulties in communicating with parents, concern with feelings about "self", problems with coping, and relations with peers need to be examined in order to better understand the problem of adolescent runaway.

Adolescents are running away at a critical time in their lives. Adolescence is the period when adolescents are trying to find their identity. Attitude and ideas about themselves, others, and the environment play an important part in the manner in which adolescents complete this stage of life. Thus, the following questions might be asked: Does the psycho-social adjustments adolescents affect the incidence of runaway behavior? Are the psycho-social adjustments of runaways different from that of non-runaways? These aspects of the complex runaway phenomenon must be examined to explore the extent to

which they contribute to the incidence of adolescence runaway.

### Significance of the Study

The purpose of the study is to examine the factors associated with the adolescent running away in an effort to gain more insight to assist in alleviating this problem. Runaway behavior does not occur suddenly. It is believed that running away is a product of many different factors that show the breakdown of relationships between youths and their parents, peers, and society. Running away is a common response to family and social pressures (Maigri, 1982).

This study addresses the different psycho-social factors that are associated with the incidence of adolescent runaway. If specific issue-response patterns in runaways can be identified, early detection and prevention strategies can be designed to assist in saving the youths from such a crisis.

The field of social work and the area of child welfare are particularly concerned about youth and their families. Both should be able to benefit from

this study. This study identifies specific areas that can be addressed in working with runaways. This should allow those in the social work profession to be better able to make decisions and operate in the best interest of the adolescent for the protection of his/her welfare. It should further assist professionals to identify runaway behavior characteristics prior to the decision to run. The significance of this research allows social workers to increase their knowledge of the stressors that are impacting the adolescent in an effort to alleviate them while enhancing the well-being of the adolescent and strengthening family life.

Child welfare is concerned with understanding psycho-social factors that can create an improper fit between the adolescent and the family situation. Social work, as a profession, addresses itself to enhancing the fit between person and the environment. The social environment has tremendous impact on children. When transactions at the interface of a child's environment are negative or destructive, the child within the family context may need help in coping (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 1987). This study has input for policies and intervention strategies that would



promote working with adolescents in their own homes rather than in foster homes.

It should further assist professionals in the field of social work to identify runaway behavior characteristics prior to the decision of the youth to run. This research should allow social work professionals to have more knowledge about the stressors that are impacting the adolescent in an effort to alleviate them, while enhancing the well-being of the adolescent and strengthening family life.

The study is significant to the researcher in that it allows the researcher to examine the psycho-social factors that influence an adolescent's decision to run away. The researcher believes that the family, school, peers, self-concept, and coping skills are significant in an adolescent's life. These factors greatly impact decisions that are made by the adolescent. Thus, this study enables the researcher to explore the relationship, if any, between these factors and an adolescent's decision to run away.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research on youths who ran away from home has a history of 40 years or more. The past research does not present a single image of the runaway, but rather a shifting configuration. Variables that identify what shifting configurations are include: socioeconomic status, concepts and causes of runaway, and values of the family. Since the incidence of adolescent runaway initially became evident, these concepts have constantly changed.

The state of the economy has been in a constant flux which exerts added pressures on one's ability to economically survive in today's world. According to Luna (1987), poverty as a social consequence takes its toll on the family unit and are important causal factors which force youth out of their families. He claims that the youths are loved and wanted but their families are unable to financially support them and they are then forced to survive on their own. This creates tension and stress for the family.

As economic situations changed, so has the image of the runaway. Initially, adolescent runaways were seen as coming from a poor, lower socioeconomic background, but later the population cut across all racial and economic boundaries. Also, the perception of the runaway has varied from that of an adventurer to a juvenile delinquent. Recent reviews indicate multiple causes for runaway behavior (Luna, 1987); Adams, 1980; Spillane-Grieco, 1984; Brennan et al., 1978). Because of this, the explanations of adolescent runaway vary. Nearly half the number of runaway youths leave home involuntarily. Forty-six percent of runaways have been pushed out or encouraged to leave by their parents (Rothman, 1986).

The relations and interactions of adolescents and the value placed on the family both have continually changed with the times. These changes have brought forth many different explanations for adolescent runaway that has a history of appearing everchanging. The role of youth in society has undergone many changes. Why youths run away from home and the meanings of running away to the child, to his family, and to society seem not to be constants, but

everchanging functions of time and place (Roberts, 1981).

It has been widely concluded that adolescents run away primarily due to problems concerning their parents (Loeb, Burke, Boglowsky, 1986). The most frequently mentioned difficulty is poor parent-child communication (Adams, 1980). Many other factors have been reported as accounting for runaways. These include low empathy and lack of positive regard on the part of both the parents and the youths (Spillane-Greico, 1984), inadequate parental love (Brennan et al., 1978), difference in values and extreme family conflict.

For many adolescents, running away is a response to an unhealthy family, work, or school situation. This running is seen as a solution to an interpersonal problem. The most consistently reported factor underlying runaway behavior is parent-child relationships and is reflected in conflict alienation from parents, interpersonal tension, and poor communication. Although there is growing evidence to indicate that ineffective parental supervision precedes runaway behavior, continued interpersonal confrontation

between the youth and the parent usually continues upon return (Young et al., 1983).

Hersch (1988) and Miller (1980) have focused their attention on the family. Collectively, their studies view home environment as a frustrating place which creates a stressful situation for family members. Care providers conclude that the root cause of runaway behavior and homeless youth is disintegration of the family structure through separation, divorce, poverty, and high mobility. Most are victims of dysfunctional families and are fleeing a stressful environment (Hersch, 1988). Youth may run when there is a crisis in the family or when they cannot cope with a series of problems.

Most young people run to avoid intolerable situations in the home. According to June Bucy (Hersch, 1988), executive director of the National Network of Runaway and Youth Services, 70% of the runaways who come to emergency shelters have been severely physically abused or sexually molested. This source further relates that thirty-six percent run from physical and sexual abuse; 44% from other severe long-term crisis such as divorce, sickness, death, and

school problems. It is likely that most of these issues are connected to some adolescents decisions to leave home.

From review of the literature regarding the three broad configurations of variables, it is noted that five main variables are dominant in examining the incidence of adolescent runaway. They include: 1) family relations, 2) self-concept, 3) peer relations, 4) coping skills, and 5) school. For the purpose of this study, each are addressed in an effort to gather a full understanding of adolescence and a cursory review of that stage of development in the context of these variables.

### Family Relations

All human societies have primary groups that are responsible for socializing the very young. By chance alone, a child is born a certain group of individuals with whom he or she will engage in frequent face-to-face interactions while learning to value these relationships. In these primary groups, commonly referred to as families, children first learn where

they belong in society and what they can expect in life (Janus, 1987).

Historically the nuclear family has been idealized as a supportive unit concerned with the development and welfare of its offspring. While a majority of Americans might believe that the nuclear family is the basic social institution in which parents and other family members have the primary responsibility of care and nurturance of children, for many young people this idealization conflicts with reality (Luna, 1987).

The major consensus finding in the literature is that family dynamics are major explanatory variables of runaway behavior. According to Jones (1988), there are five subtypes of runaways who run away from home due to family relations: a) "Escaping" a destructive situation, b) Escaping family conflict, c) Running from family crisis, d) Running as a cry for help, and e) Running as an unsharable problem.

1. "Escaping" a destructive situation is referred to the type of runaway who is "fleeing from" unresolved family problems, such as alcoholic parents, incest, parental violence, or neglect. Depending upon family circumstances, running away may be a rational decision

because of the potential danger they are exposed to in the home. The prognosis for return may be poor, but one can assume there are still some parent-child links within these families.

2. Escaping family conflict is a situation in which an adolescent runs away as a result of conflict between parent-child. A frequently mentioned difficulty is poor parent-child communication.

Runaways often describe their relationships with their parents as poor or hostile (Jones, 1988; Kammer & Schmidt, 1987; Adams & Munro, 1979; and Adams, Gullotta, & Clancy, 1985). Running away behavior often occurs as a conflict between parent and child over such issues as curfews, dating, hygiene, and dress. Kammer and Schmidt (1987) indicate that in the family, parental affirmation is frequently replaced with criticism, making the anticipation of a positive, rewarding future seem remote to adolescents. They also found that most parent-child confrontations leading to runaway behavior are provoked by differences that both generations see as unresolvable. Furthermore, they reported that these differences are seldom eliminated when the child and parents attempt reconciliation.



Adams and Munro (1979) suggest that many runaways feel conflict with their parents' value systems and a loss of individuality in their families. They often have poor communication with their parents. Runaways feel a lack of warmth, affection, and support from their families. They often perceive their families as cold, not understanding, and indifferent. Consistent with prior research, Adams (1985) says that runaways perceived extensive parent-child conflict in their homes. The inter-personal relationship between parent and child was perceived to be stressed. Restrictive supervision by both parents is a common perception of runaways.

In this case of adolescent runaway, parental control is seen as excessive. These youths leave home as rejection of what they feel is an environment which exercises too much control over their behavior. Often they assume they will find an environment where their decision-making will be made autonomous. A characteristic of this type of runaway is that they perceive themselves as powerless in influencing parent decisions. Running away, is seen by the youth as one of a very limited set of options to control their

environment. Intervention with these families should be aimed at improving parent-child communications, and possibly helping the parents establish new means of limit setting by parents. The prospects for family reunification for these youths are good since family ties have not been completely severed (Jones, 1988).

3. Running from family crisis is the category of adolescents who run because of the stress brought in by family crisis such as divorce, separation, parental discord, and financial loss (Brennan et al., 1978; Johnson & Carter, 1985). Crisis runaways may regard their running away as temporary, and they are likely to return home after a few days or weeks. These youths have strong ties to their families. While out of the home they may feel deeply conflicted and guilty about their actions because their running causes a crisis in their families lives. These runaways may have left home simply to escape stress or to pursue their own ends in an environment free of stress.

Brennan et al. (1978) say that changes in family structure or changes in interpersonal relationships in the home and external influences that impinge upon family relationships may all generate strain on normal

family relationships and provide a motive for running away. Some of the changes in the homes were cited as divorce, death, separation, parental discord, and presence of a new adult or extended family member. While some of the changes in the family's economic and/or social position were described as unemployment, change of job, and change of residence. When disruptive events occur, parents and their children often become involved in greater stress and conflict. To the extent that these stresses impinge on conventional youth needs and goals, such as love and affection, security, autonomy, and feelings of competence, and self-worth, running away may become a response to such tension and the real or anticipated failure at home.

Johnson and Carter (1985) suggests that homes that spawn runaways are typically marred by high rates of internal conflict, divorce, residential mobility, and death. Parents tend to discipline their children in physically and psychologically abusive ways, including beatings and social isolation. Such punishments, more often than not, are supplemented by negative and dehumanizing labels. Such parents, in other words,

come to terms with their importance by displays of power and control over their children. The prognosis is excellent for family reunification assuming the family is normally stable, but temporarily dysfunctional due to crisis. Such families respond well to short-term family treatment.

4. Running as a cry for help is a group of runaways who run from home hoping to bring attention to unhappy family situations by running. These runaways return home, often voluntarily after a short-time. If their efforts fail to improve the situation they may run away again (Jones, 1988).

5. Running with an unsharable problem is a type of runaway who leaves home for fear of parental reactions to situations in their life. Jones (1988) reveals that the most common of such problems are pregnancy, homosexuality, and school failure. This type of runaway is desperate for help and is naive and thus easily open to exploitation by members of the street culture. Individuals in this group will often return home after only a brief time on the street.

The family backgrounds of the runaways seem to point to a general lack of stability, to a breakdown in

communication networks, and open for the question of serious identity crisis for the young person growing up, in such families (Miller, 1980). According to Janus (1987), the quality of the family environment is an important influence on the development of a child's self-concept, regardless of the type of family structure whether it is a single parent or two parents. Family cohesion, when measured through the child's perception of family relationships and family and family conflict are particularly important factors. Further, the development of a poor self-concept is influenced by family conflict even when the conflict occurred several years earlier.

### Self-Concept

Adams et al. (1985) have suggested that runaways have a poor self-image. According to Wolk & Brandon (1977), "the dimension of the individual perception of self as playing a role in adjustment and development has been taken as an axiom by many psychologist" (p. 178). Self perception has been related to studies in achievement, delinquency, and vocational choice. Although little systematic research has covered

possible self-concept conditions of runaway adolescents, Wolk and Brandon (1977) further cites that the self-concept and aspects of self, such as ego control, anxiety, and self-esteem have been identified in the causality or consequences of maladjustment. It is self-concept that also reflects a difficulty in maintaining interpersonal relationships and a preoccupation with and a pessimism for resolving personal problems.

Runaways have been described as having poor self concepts and poor perceptions of their ability to exert control over their environment. These characteristics are indicative of poor social and psychological adjustment and decrease the youths ability to cope constructively with stressors encountered both before and after leaving home (Janus, 1987).

### Coping Skills

An individual is normally able to maintain a balance between inner tensions and outer stresses through the use of familiar behavior patterns (Roberts, 1981). Everyone encounters stresses in everyday living, but in most cases these stresses are resolved

by various previously learned methods of problem-solving and coping. When an individual is involved in an intolerable situation which cannot be resolved by previously learned methods of coping, that individual may rapidly proceed to a state of crisis (Roberts, 1981).

Roberts (1981) further cites that adolescence is often viewed as a maturational crisis stage significant to the formation of one's unique identity and positive self-image. Adolescence has been acknowledged as a period of socialization in which an individual is characteristically faced with social and moral dilemmas regarding a desire for growing autonomy, goal setting for the future, and pressure from peer groups to experiment with drugs and to engage in sexual behavior. Adolescence is a time when critical demands are made on them to deal with major stressful events. The major emphasis is not upon the stressful event itself but the individual's reaction to stress (Roberts, 1981).

All youths are confronted with the adjustment to adolescence. This requires the use of their coping skills as this adjustment is a difficult period in their life. Coping can be regarded as a process of

adaptive behavior calling for the mastery of new situations involving potential threat, challenge, or gratification. Coping is defined as "the problem-solving efforts made by an individual when that individual encounters a situation which is potentially threatening and considerably taxing to his or her resources" (Roberts, 1981, p. 31).

#### Peer Relations

Studies have indicated that runaways experience severe peer relation problems (Adams et al., 1985). Runaways often feel lonely, bored, and rejected. These complaints imply an underlying inadequacy in peer relationships (Brennan et al., 1978). Researchers generally agree that runaways are characterized by low self esteem. This in itself will create difficulties for their interpersonal peer relationships. Brennan et al. (1978) have found that low self-esteem renders the youth over-sensitive to the criticisms of other youth and excessively fearful of rejection. The excessive need for protection of what self esteem the runaway has may lead to inadequate or stressed peer relationships.



Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman (1987) cite that adolescents have a strong drive and desire to be accepted by their peers. Peers are an important influence on adolescents. Once an adolescent becomes a member of a peer group, the members of that subgroup influence each other. The transactions adolescents have with their peers affect their behavior and social development. These transactions occur in many environmental settings, one of which is school.

#### School

According to Johnson and Carter (1980), "School serves as an arena for failure for children reared in the formative environment that characteristically produce runaways. Rejects at home, they become the 'outs' at school. These youths are usually in slow learner classes, left back to repeat grades, ostracized by teachers and peers. They are even subject to violence in the form of physical disciplining by teachers and physical fights by peers. They respond with a retreat into apathy, with reduced ambition, and with an expectation of defeat. There is also the

feeling that they are outsiders, strangers in a world which basic institutions like the family and the school stand in the path of success, blocking one's chances for a real life" (p. 314).

Studies have found that runaways have serious school problems, including truancy, dropping out, pregnancy, alcohol and drug abuse, severe depression, and suicide (Kammer & Schmidt, 1987). Runaways are more likely to be enrolled in vocational and non-academic events in school. In addition, they have poorer grades, are less interested in college, and have more difficulty getting along with teachers and school counselors.

From the review of literature, emphasis has been placed on discussing five major contexts of the incidence of adolescent runaway; a) family relations, b) peer relations, c) school, d) coping skills, and e) self-concept. Runaways place themselves at risk of not completing the normal process of development during adolescence and are likely to experience many negative life event consequences. To get a full understanding of the adolescent, there is a need to further examine the period of adolescence and the developmental issue

and interpersonal tasks of the Eriksonian stage of identity versus role diffusion as it pertains to the adolescent. These youth confront the current physiological changes and psychosocial tasks of the developmental stage (Kimmel & Weiner, 1985).

### Adolescence

Erikson defines adolescence from a psychoanalytic ego psychology view while including a socio-cultural perspective. Kimmel and Weiner (1985) indicates that Eriksons's theory cites the following:

1. It emphasizes adaptive rather than instinctive strivings in people (how they cope rather than what drives them).
2. It examines the role of environmental influences as well as events in modifying behavior.
3. It identifies and addresses a lifelong cycle of personality development.

Kimmel and Weiner (1985) also speaks of Erikson's eight stages of life from birth to death. Each stage represents a crucial turning point in which certain psychological issues are placed and resolved for better or worse. The struggle involves both inner (psycho)

processes and over (social) processes. Since the concern is adolescence, the fifth stage that is looked at is identity versus role diffusion, which includes ages 12-17.

Erikson's fifth stage arises with the beginning of puberty and the increasing social need to find one's role in life as a sexual, productive, responsible adult with a reasonably consistent set of attitudes and values. The positive side of the struggle is a sense of identity -- a sense of continuity and consistency of the self over time. The negative side is a sense of confusion about one's identity or role -- a lack of certainty about who one is, or about the part one is playing in life. The resolution of this stage involves experiencing each of these opposing tendencies within oneself and in relation to one's social environment.

The period of life known as adolescence generally refers to the transition between childhood and adulthood. In our society it corresponds approximately to the teen years. The beginning of adolescence is best defined by biological age -- the physical changes of puberty, such as the rapid increase in height, the development of breasts in girls and growth of the

testes and penis in boys. The conclusion of adolescence is best defined by social age -- the social roles and behaviors that are regarded as adult (Kimmel & Weiner, 1985).

Over time, there has been different views regarding the factors that one associates with runaways. Many researchers have studied the nature and causes of runaway behavior; various viewpoints have been proposed to explain why adolescents run away from home. The psychological viewpoint assumes that the child is in some sense pathological, has poor impulse control, and is deviant (Spillane-Grieco, 1984). This focuses on the belief that the adolescent is psychologically deficient. The social environment viewpoint, in contrast, assumes that the family is the cause of the child leaving home (Spillane-Grieco, 1984). With this perspective, environmental situations within the family is seen as the cause of adolescent runaway.

Another perspective argues that the social-psychological view to the study of human behavior is a social systems approach and the importance of the individuals perception of the world

around him must be explored when studying runaways (Miller, 1980). This perspective argues that the causes of adolescent runaways are both psychologically and socially related. According to Ek and Steelman (1988), it is presumed that runaways have problems interacting with significant others in their lives. More specifically, it is expected that this phenomenon is understandable from the interactionist perspective which contends that social behavior is a function of interactions with other people and how people interpret conditions around them. Under interactionist reasoning, a person does not respond directly to the social world, but to the meanings he or she attaches to it.

### Major Theoretical Orientations

From further review of the literature, it is shown that there are many inconsistencies in past studies of the runaway population. There is no common language, no coherent theoretical explanations. The use of concepts differ, and different approaches are used because researchers identify themselves with different disciplines such as social work, criminology,

psychology, or sociology (Roberts, 1981). Although the runaway population is complex and lacks a unifying conceptual framework, three fundamental perspectives on adolescent runaway are dominant in the literature: a) psychological/psychopathological, b) social-structural/environmental, and c) social-psychological.

One early school of thought stemming from the literature, saw runaways as disordered or sick and suffering from a variety of different kinds of psychopathology (Brennan et al., 1978). Historically, runaways have been characterized as being maladaptive, delinquent, and suffering from psychopathology (Speck, Ginther, & Helton, 1988). According to Adams et al. (1985) from the psychopathological perspective, runaway behavior is thought of to be an expression of undercontrolled impulsive personality characteristics. This was a dominant theme of literature from the 1930's to the 1950's and has continued to be represented in more recent work.

In 1968, the American Psychiatric Association included the Runaway Reaction as a diagnostic category in the DSM-II (Speck et al., 1988). This places

runaway into a framework of the medical treatment model and indicates a high level of acceptance by the American Psychiatric Association of the idea that runaway behavior originates in personal pathology. In this theory, the cause is located in the youth. The personal psychological dynamics and personal functioning of the youth are held responsible for his or her behavior (Brennan et al., 1978). Summed up, this view focuses on blaming the youth. In reviewing the above literature, it can be seen that prior research, mainly by psychiatrists and psychologists, have been focused on the psychological dynamics of the individual runaway youth.

In contrast to the pathological views of running away from home, Brennan et al. (1978) and Ambrosino (1971) reported evidence of running away from home as being essentially non-delinquent and non-pathological (Speck et al., 1988). In this perspective, the cause is not located in the youth, but is seen to inherent in the environmental situation. Compelling social conditions such as cruel parents, neglect, physical violence, and rejection are emphasized (Brennan et al., 1978). It is not the personality characteristics of



the youth which need "treatment", but rather the social conditions which should be modified. This view identifies the environment as a causal factor in the adolescent's decision to run away.

The social-psychological perspective assumes that the psychological and environmental views may contain only part of the truth. The basic assumption is that runaway behavior results from interaction between certain kinds of social conditions and the individual personality of the youth. This cause is emphasized as inhering in the joint interaction between the person and the environment (Brennan et al., 1978).

This perspective recognizes the importance of both the person and the environment, and avoids the narrow focus of the other two orientations. This view identifies the interaction as contributing to the adolescent running away.

According to Josselyn (1978), the psycho-social theory provided a framework for dealing with the practical problems of helping children negotiate the hazards of the growth process; it relates psychological factors of social development. It allows one to understand the interaction of social and emotional

influences of the lives of youths. Running away is an individual and social phenomenon. It gives evidence of the relationship between individual and social phenomenon (Yardley and Heness, 1987).

It can be concluded that an individual interacts in various social contexts, and it is important to examine all of these different contexts for potential causal influences. The young adolescent is immersed in a powerful social problem which failed to take a broadly based social and psychological perspective could only lead to a partial understanding of the phenomena (Brennan et al., 1978).

The psycho-social theoretical framework provides the premise for transactions among adolescent runaways and has importance in this research. The researcher finds this theory to be the most significant theoretical framework to utilize for the purpose of this study.

### Definition of Terms

The purpose of this study is to investigate important psychological and social variables as they relate to the psycho-social adjustments of adolescent

runaway. Several concepts must be defined in order to better understand their importance in this study. They include:

Psychosocial involves both psychological and social aspects of a given situation. For the purpose of this study, psychosocial aspects are defined as family relations, self-concept, peer relations, and school relations as they relate to the development of adolescent. These variables affect adolescents as they carry out their daily life functions and are, therefore, examined in the context in which they affect the incidence of adolescent runaway behavior.

Runaway is "a young person between the ages of 12-17 who leaves home with the intention of running away, stays for more than 48 hours without parental permission, and knows that he or she will be missed." (Brennan et al., 1978, p. 48).

Adolescent The transition between childhood and adulthood is considered adolescence. According to Kimmel and Weiner (1985), adolescence is a period of change, growth, and disequilibrium in terms of physical, social, and sexual maturity. One is not a child, but also not an adult. In early adolescence,

growth and development are characterized by rapid physical changes, maturation of conceptual ability, heightened sensitivity by peers, and establishment of heterosexual relationship (Timberlake & Verdieck, 1987). The psychosocial developmental conflict of group membership and identity vs. isolation and alienation that is experienced by all adolescents tends to be strongly influenced by external forces that brings on the establishment of a positive or negative self-concept (Timberlake & Verdieck, 1987).

Adolescents usually experience a psychosocial crisis. This is a concept that states that individuals go through predictable phases or stages of development both mentally and socially throughout their lives; each stage presents unique circumstances and challenges that the person must meet in order to make healthy developmental progress. The crisis occurs when the individual has had little prior experience in meeting the demands of the new stage and may become conflicted and less effective until the necessary social and psychological adjustments are made (Barker, 1987).

Adjustment is "an individual's activities to satisfy a need to overcome an obstacle in order to return to a

harmonious fit with the environment" (Barker, 1987, p. 140). These activities may become habitual responses. Successful adjustment results in adaptation.

Unsuccessful adaptation is called maladjustments.

Maladjustment is "the inability to develop behavior, thoughts, values needed to succeed in the environment" (Barker, 1987, p. 140). "The self-concept and aspects of the self such as ego control, anxiety, and self-esteem have been identified in the consequences of maladjustment" (Wolk & Brandon, 1977, p. 172).

Family Relations is "the interaction of all those who are significantly related to the family, whether by blood or physical presence; activity among any of these persons in the network affects the functioning of the family" (Janzen & Harris, 1986, p. 141).

Peer Relations is "the way an individual interacts and feels about the people he/she plays, works, or associates with most of the time; those individuals who absorb most of the available social energy of the youth and becomes a primary reference group" (Anderson & Carter, 1978, p. 156).

Self-Concept is the way an individual perceives himself; the mental image one has of himself.

Coping is "the problem solving efforts made by an individual when that individual encounters a situation which is potentially taxing to his resources" (Roberts, 1981, p. 31).

School is "an organization that provides instruction as an institution for the teaching of children (Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 1983), p. 1051); which also serves as a primary social institution for adolescents.

### Statement of the Hypotheses

This study focuses on the psychosocial adjustment of adolescents and their incidence of runaway behavior. To fully understand their relatedness, the study addresses the following question: Does the psycho-social adjustment of the adolescent show a relationship to the incidence of runaway behavior?

Hypotheses #1: There is no significant difference between the psycho-social adjustment of adolescents and their incidence of runaway behavior.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### Research Design

The causal comparative design was employed to obtain the answer to the research question. Causal-comparative approach is concerned with the factors which produce the condition observed and without which the condition would not exist (McGrath, Jelenek, & Wochner, 1963). This technique allows the researcher to gain greater insight into complex situations by selecting two groups at opposite ends of the continuum in order to identify the factors on the basis of which one group can be distinguished from the other (McGrath et al., 1963). With this design, the one group consisted of runaways, and the other group consisted of non-runaways. This design allowed the researcher to infer causal inferences and make comparison possible between the groups.

#### Research Setting

Two runaway samples from two different populations were used. The initial runaway sample was taken from a

runaway shelter for adolescents in Metro-Atlanta. The shelter was populated at full capacity by 24 adolescent runaways, ages 12-17, male and female, who resided at the shelter. The sample consisted of 5 adolescents, male and female, ages 14-15, who were residing at the shelter during March 1989. This shelter provided emergency housing, food, and counseling for runaways. A comparison of subject characteristics to those of the overall client population in terms of age, race, education, and religion indicated that this sample was representative of adolescents who used this shelter.

The second sample was taken from a youth center for adolescent males in Atlanta. The shelter was populated at full capacity by 100 adjudicated delinquent males, ages 9-16. The sample consisted of 5 adolescent male runaways, ages 13-16 who were in the center during the early part of April, 1989. They were selected based on availability.

The non-runaway population was taken from adolescents at Towers High School in Dekalb County, in Atlanta, Georgia. The school had 1300 students, ages 13-18, male and female, in grades ranging from eighth



to twelfth. The students were enrolled in Towers High School during the academic year of 1988-1989. The sample included 25 non-runaways from this population, ages 16-17 who were attending a Reading Skills class during the month of March 1989. They were selected based on availability.

### Sampling

Sampling procedures fall into two major classifications, probability and non-probability. A non-probability sample was obtained using a convenient sample. With an availability (convenient) sampling technique, the researcher uses the first available appropriate sampling units. In this case, an availability (convenient) sample was obtained as the researcher selected runaways conveniently available in the runaway shelter, the youth center for male adolescents, and the non-runaways in Towers High School. The sample is non representative of the total non-runaway and runaway population.

### Data Collection

The procedures used to gather data was the survey research method. This method attempts to explore the

relevant variables affecting the research question. The quantitative device that was used for systematically collecting data from samples of population was collected by employing self-instructed questionnaires as a data gathering device. The questions that comprised the questionnaire were valid and reliable. The questions were selected from the Hudson Clinical Package of index scales.

The psychosocial adjustment of runaways and non-runaways was measured by means of a series of questions, with the alternative answers being ranked in descending order. The questionnaire consisted of 40 questions. The items that made up the questionnaire included demographics and questions that accessed the perceptions of adolescents as it related to psychosocial adjustment in the following areas: family relations, peer relations, school, self-concept, and coping skills. This survey provides accurate, quantitative descriptive data which cannot be generalized to the runaway nor non-runaway population. This instrument maximizes the response rate of runaways and non-runaways in sample population, while minimizing the amount of error in the response of the individual.

### Data Analysis

The parametric statistics test was used to compare the means of two individual groups in this study. The T-test was used to compare the mean of runaways and non-runaways on their psychosocial adjustment. The runaways were the experimental group and non-runaways were the control group. The purpose was to determine whether there was a statistical significant difference between the two groups on the psychosocial adjustment scale. In addition, to the T-test, descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used for analysis of the data. The SPSSX Batch System on the Atlanta University Vax computer system was used as a tool for the analysis of the data.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

This chapter presents the statistical analysis and discussion of data for this study. This chapter is divided into four sections: 1) demographic data, 2) descriptive statistics, 3) testing of the research hypothesis, and 4) discussion of the research hypothesis. The finding will also present collective information of each variable and a detailed description of the findings. Explanation of the data will be presented for each finding.

#### Demographic Data

##### Age

In this study, 10% (2) of the respondents were 13 years old, 10%(2) were 14 years old, 10% (2) were 15 years old, 35% (7) were 16 years old, and 35% (7) were 17 years old.

##### Race

Seventy percent (14) of the respondents were Black, 25% (5) were White, and 5% (1) were Native American.

### Religion

Fifty-five percent (11) of those who participated in the study reported a religion other than Protestant and Catholic. Thirty percent (6) reported no religion. Ten percent (2) indicated Catholic as a religion and 5% (1) reported Protestant as a religion.

### Grade Level

In this study, 25% (5) of the respondents had completed the 9th grade, 25% (5) had completed the 10th grade, 15% (3) had completed the 6th grade, 15% (3) had completed the 11th grade, 10% (2) had completed the 7th grade, and 10% (2) had completed the 8th grade.

### Sex

Seventy percent of the respondents (14) were male and 30% (6) were female.

Table 1: DEMOGRAPHIC DATA. Frequency and percentage of demographics scale: age, race, religion, grade level, and sex of runaways and non-runaways.

Table 1A: AGE

VARIABLE	FREQUENCY	%
AGE		
13	2	10
14	2	10
15	2	10
16	7	35
17	7	35
TOTALS	20	100

TABLE 1B: RACE

BLACK	14	70
WHITE	5	25
NATIVE AMERICAN	<u>1</u>	<u>5</u>
TOTALS	20	100

TABLE 1C: RELIGION

VARIABLE	FREQUENCY	%
Protestant	1	5
Catholic	2	10
None	6	30
Other	<u>11</u>	<u>55</u>
TOTALS	20	100

TABLE 1D: GRADE LEVEL

6	3	15
7	2	10
8	2	10
9	5	25
10	5	25
11	<u>3</u>	<u>15</u>
TOTALS	20	100

TABLE 1E: SEX

MALE	14	70
FEMALE	<u>6</u>	<u>30</u>
TOTALS	20	100

Ho: There is no significant difference between the incidence of adolescent runaway and the psycho-social adjustment in the area of family relations.

Table 2 is a t-test analysis of the psycho-social adjustment in the area of family relations as it relates to runaways and non-runaways. Level of significance  $p > .05$ .

TABLE 2: FAMILY RELATIONS

GROUP	No. of Cases	Mean	SD	T-Val	DF	Prob.
Runaways	10	31.6	3.950	-1.28	18	.215*
Non-Runaways	10	33.4	2.011			

\* $P > .05$

SD=Standard Deviation

T-Val = T-Value

DF=Degree of Freedom

Prob=Two-tailed probability

Based on the results of the t-test analysis as seen on Table 2 ( $t=1.28$ ,  $df=18$ ,  $p > .05$ ) we accept the null hypothesis between the incidence of adolescent runaway and the psycho-social adjustment in the area of family relations for the runaway and non-runaway.

When each question in the category of family relations was analyzed, the findings reflected that there was a significant difference between the two

groups in their responses to item #3 in regards to getting along with family, item #6 in reference to feeling left out of the family, and item #14 concerning relationship with mother. A detailed analysis of these items are found in Table 2A in the Appendices.



Ho: There is no significant difference between the incidence of adolescent runaway and the psycho-social adjustment in the area of peer relations.

TABLE 3: PEER RELATIONS

Group	No. of Cases	Mean	SD	T-Val	DF	Prob.
Runaways	10	20.000	1.155	2.35	18	.030*
Non-runaways	10	18.100	2.283			

\*P > .05

SD=Standard Deviation

T-Val=T-Value

DF=Degree of freedom

Prob=Two-tailed probability

Based on the results of the t-Test analysis as seen on Table 3 ( $t=2.35$ ,  $df=18$ ,  $P>.05$ ) we reject the null hypothesis and accept the researcher hypothesis that there is a significant difference between the incidence of adolescent runaway and the psycho-social adjustment in the area of peer relations.

In the area of peer relations, as it relates to the incidence of adolescent runaway, a significant difference is shown between the two groups. Item #19, referring to relationship with peers in Table 3A (Appendices) is the item that is most significant. A detailed presentation of this table is found in the Appendices.

Ho: There is no significant difference between the incidence of adolescent runaway and the psycho-social adjustment in the area of self-concept.

Table 4 is a t-Test analysis of the psycho-social adjustment in the area of self-concept as it relates to runaways and non-runaways. The significance was determined at the level of  $P > .05$ .

Table 4: SELF -CONCEPT

Group	No. of Cases	Mean	SD	T-Val	DF	Prob.
Runaways	10	18.000	2.404	.00	18	1.000*
Non-runaways	10	18.000	2.357			

\*  $P > .05$

SD=Standard Deviation

T-Val=T-Value

DF=Degree of freedom  
Prob=Two-tailed probability

Based on the results of the t-Test analysis as seen on Table 4 ( $t=.00$ ,  $df=18$ ,  $P > .05$ ) we accept the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the incidence of adolescent runaway and the psycho-social adjustment in the area of self-concept.

When each question in the category of self-concept was analyzed, the findings reflected that there was a

significant difference between the two groups in their responses to question #29 concerning feelings about themselves (Table 4A, Appendices). A detailed presentation of these findings can be found in the Table 4A.

Ho: There is no significant difference between the incidence of adolescent runaway and the psycho-social adjustment in the area of school.

Table 5 is a t-Test analysis of the psycho-social adjustment in the area of school as it related to runaways and non-runaways. Level of significance was  $P > .05$ .

Table 5: SCHOOL

Group	No. of		Mean	SD	T-Val	DF	Prob
	Cases						
Runaways	10	13.4	1.508				
					1.21	18	.24*
Non-runaways	10	12.1	3.035				

\* $P > .05$

DF=Degree of freedom

SD=Standard Deviation

Prob=Two-tailed probability

T-Val=T-Value

Based on the results of the t-Test analysis as seen on Table 7 ( $t=1.21$ ,  $DF=18$ ,  $P .05$ ) we accept the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the incidence of adolescent runaway and the psycho-social adjustment in the area of school.

In the area of school, as it relates to the incidence of adolescent runaway, a significant difference is shown between the two groups. Item number 34 in Table 5A. Item number 34, concerning the importance of school, is the item that is most significant.

A detailed presentation of this table is found in the Appendices.

Ho: There is no significant difference between the incidence of adolescent runaway and the psycho-social adjustment in the area of coping skills.

Table 6 is a t-Test analysis of the psycho-social adjustment in the area of coping skills as it relates to runaways and non-runaways. Level of significance  $P > .05$ .

Table 6: COPING SKILLS

Group	No. of Cases	Mean	SD	T-Val	DF	Prob
Runaways	10	14.80	1.135	-0.23	18	.823*
Non-runaways	10	15.00	2.53%			

\*  $P > .05$

SD=Standard Deviation

T-Val=T-Value

DF=Degree of freedom

Prob=Two-tailed probability

Based on the results of the t-Test analysis as seen on Table 6 ( $t=0.23$ ,  $df=18$ ,  $P > .05$ ) we accept the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the incidence of adolescent runaways and the psycho-social adjustment in the area of coping skills between the two groups.

When each question in the category of coping skills was analyzed, the findings indicated that there was a significant difference between the two groups in their responses to #36 regarding coping ability. (Table 6A, Appendices). A detailed presentation of the findings on coping is in Table 6A.

In this study, five variables, family relations, peer relations, self-concept, school, and coping skills were used to measure adolescents psycho-social adjustment. Out of these five variables, a significant difference was shown in the area of peer relations.

In the area of peer relations, item #19 in Table 3A shows the most significant difference between the two groups. Item #29 has a t-value of 4.06 and a two-tailed probability of .49. A detailed presentation of peer relations is found in Table 3A (Appendices).

No significant difference between the two groups was found in the other four areas, family relation, self-concept, coping skills, and school. Each area, however, did consist of specific items in which a significant difference was shown.

In Table 2A, (Appendices), item #3 relating to getting along with their family, item #6 referring to

feeling left out of family, and item #4 concerning the relationship with the mother, all in the area of family relations, indicate a significant difference between runaways and non-runaways. Item #3 has a t-value of 10.25 and a two-tailed probability of .002. Item #14 has a t-value of 6.81 and a two-tailed probability of .009. A detailed analysis of these items and other items is found in Table 2A.

In the category of self-concept, the most significant difference between the two groups was indicated in item #29 in Table 4A. The t-value is 2.77 and the two-tailed probability is .146. A detailed presentation of these findings can be found in the Appendices.

In Table 5A, (Appendices), in the area of school, item #34 shows the most significant difference between the two groups with a t-value of 2.66 and a two-tailed probability of .161. A detailed analysis of these items is located in the Appendices.

In the area of coping skills, the most significant difference between the two groups was identified in item #36, in Table 6A (Appendices). The t-value is 3.78 and the two tailed probability is .061. An



analysis of all items on coping skills is described in Table 6A.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The causes of adolescent runaway are multifaceted and diverse. As a result, research on the the psycho-social adjustment of the adolescent runaway is difficult. However, the increase in the number of adolescents who runaway has called for an increase in research on this population.

This study was designed to measure the psycho-social adjustment of adolescents in the area of family relations, peer relations, school, self-concept, and coping skills as they are related to the incidence of runaway behavior. Out of these five variables, a significant difference between runaway and non-runaway adolescents was shown in the area of peer relations. In a study conducted by Goldmeir & Dean (1973), it was found that runaways show a greater tendency to turn to their peers rather than adults when in trouble. Non-runaways, on the other hand, indicated an ability to relate to adults. No significant difference was found in the other four areas of family relations, self-concept, coping skills, and school. In this study, unlike the majority of research in this area,

there was no significant difference found in the category of family relations between the two groups. As stated in suggested research directions, an extensive examination is necessary to determine the reason for the variation in this study.

It can be concluded that peer relations, in this study, was the area in which there was any significant difference between the two groups, related to adjustment factors associated with an adolescent's decision to run away. There was no significant difference in the other four areas possibly due to the small sample size of only 20 respondents. It is difficult to generalize and make predictions from small sample populations. There were more questions in one area which possibly could have altered the outcome of the results.

#### Limitations

A major limitation of this study was the small sample size. Only twenty participants were surveyed and this decreased the representation of the population of runaway and non-runaway adolescents. As a result, the outcome of the research cannot be generalized to

the total population of runaway and non-runaway adolescents.

Another limitation was centered around the number of questions in each variable. Some of the variables included more questions than others. Thus, it altered the outcome of the results for that areas, which might be considered an imbalance. The respondents answered a different amount of questions for some areas and not for others.

#### Suggested Research Directions

This study has suggested research directions for further studies in this area. One of which is to have a larger sample population. A larger sample population of runaways and non-runaways should allow better representation of the total population of each group. As a result, the findings could be generalized to the larger population.

Secondly, it may be beneficial to have a balanced grouping of questions of each variable studied. This would provide a more evenly distributed number of questions in each area to prevent altered results.

Lastly, further research should be done to closely examine and re-test the items from each category that did show a significant difference between the two groups independently of the other items where there was a significance.

## CHAPTER SIX

### IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK

This research has many implications for social work. In the area of peer relations, social work professionals can explore the relationships among adolescents and examine the interactions that occur among them. This, as a result, will give the professionals more knowledge about this area and keep them abreast of current information that can be helpful in working with adolescents. Professionals in the field of social work can research the effectiveness of existing intervention techniques that relate to adolescents and their relationship with their peers.

Professionals in the field of social work can continue to work with the family in dealing with the concerns of the adolescent. In this study, there were areas of significant difference between runaways and non-runaways in the category of family relations. Family members must understand the importance of peer groups to adolescents and their impact on the behavior of those in the groups. It is important not to view the adolescent and his or her peers in isolation. It

is necessary for the social work professionals to perceive the adolescent in view of his/her peers and his/her self-concept as well.

In relation to child welfare, runaways who are not reunited within their family may be placed in foster care. The researcher suggests that foster care parents be informed that adolescents can be swayed by their peers. This is important for foster care parents because adolescents may be more comfortable and familiar with their peers than foster parents, and that this relationship may take precedence over relationships within the foster family.

The psycho-social theoretical framework provides a premise for transactions among adolescent runaways and had importance in this research. Thus, this theory provides a framework for working with adolescents and their peers by helping them deal with their problems by relating the psychological factors of running away with the social development of this period in their lives. The psycho-social theoretical framework allows social workers to understand the social and emotional influences of the lives of adolescents, including their relationship with their peers.

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## APPENDICES

- Appendix A - Questionnaire
- Appendix B - Table 2A: Family Relations Detailed Analysis
- Appendix C - Table 3A: Peer Relations Detailed Analysis
- Appendix D - Table 4A: Self Concept Detailed Analysis
- Appendix E - Table 5A: School Concept Detailed Analysis
- Appendix F - Table 6A: Coping Skills Detailed Analysis

ATLANTA UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK  
223 James P. Brawley Drive, SW  
Atlanta, Georgia 30314-4391  
(404) 653-8548

March 23, 1989

Dear Participant,

The enclosed questionnaire was constructed to gain knowledge about how adolescents perceive themselves in different areas such as family relations, peer relations, self-concept, coping skills, and school. There is no access to your name or any other type of identification. Your responses will be taken as representative of the many students who did not participate in this research.

Your answers are extremely important. It is our hope that you will allow us a few minutes of your time to answer the questions. As you look over the questionnaire, you will see that there are no identifying names or marks. You can be assured that any information you give will be given in complete anonymity.

There are no right or wrong answers. Your perceptions are what is important. However, it is essential that you answer the questions as accurately and honestly as possible.

Thank you for participating in this important study.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Felton  
Second Year Student

cc: Professor Naomi T. Ward, Thesis Advisor  
Dr. Amox Ajo, Research Advisor

## QUESTIONNAIRE

The following items ask for your perceptions in several areas. Answer by circling the letter which most closely identifies your response to each statement. The following are response categories:

- A - Strongly agree
- B - Agree
- C - Neutral, indifferent, or don't know
- D - Disagree
- E - Strongly disagree

Please respond to all items. Thank You.

- |  |           |
|--|-----------|
| 1) I really enjoy my family              | A B C D E |
| 2) I wish I was not part of this family  | A B C D E |
| 3) I get along well with my family       | A B C D E |
| 4) My family does not understand me      | A B C D E |
| 5) There is a lot of love in my family   | A B C D E |
| 6) I feel left out of my family          | A B C D E |
| 7) I get along well with my father       | A B C D E |
| 8) I dislike my father                   | A B C D E |
| 9) I feel that I can trust my father.    | A B C D E |
| 10) I feel that I do not love my father. | A B C D E |
| 11) I like being with my father          | A B C D E |
| 12) My father is too demanding           | A B C D E |
| 13) I get along well with my mother      | A B C D E |
| 14) I dislike my mother                  | A B C D E |
| 15) I feel that I can trust my mother    | A B C D E |



- 16) I feel that I do not love my mother. A B C D E
- 17) I like being with my mother. A B C D E
- 18) My mother is too demanding A B C D E
- 19) I get along well with my peers. A B C D E
- 20) I don't feel like I am part of the group A B C D E
- 21) My peers really understand me A B C D E
- 22) I really feel like I am disliked by my  
peers A B C D E
- 23) I feel like I am an important member of  
my peer group A B C D E
- 24) I wish I were not a part of this peer  
group A B C D E
- 25) I feel that people would not like me if  
they really knew me A B C D E
- 26) I feel that I am a very competent person A B C D E
- 27) I feel that I need more self-confidence A B C D E
- 28) I feel that people really like me very  
much A B C D E
- 29) I feel that I get pushed around more  
than others A B C D E
- 30) My friends think highly of me A B C D E
- 31) I like school A B C D E
- 32) I don't feel that school is for me A B C D E

- 33) I get along well with the teachers at school A B C D E
- 34) School is important to me A B C D E
- 35) I do well in school A B C D E
- 36) I deal well with my problems A B C D E
- 37) I don't feel that I can handle stressful situations A B C D E
- 38) I feel that I can resolve any problem that I have A B C D E
- 39) I don't know how to deal with my problems. A B C D E
- 40) I need to improve my skills for handling problems A B C D E

#### PERSONAL DATA

- 1) How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) What race do you consider yourself? (Please circle one)  
 Black                      Hispanic                      Native American  
 White                      Asian                      Other \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) What is your religion?  
 Protestant      Jewish                      Catholic  
 None                      Other \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) What is the last grade that you have completed? \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) Are you male or female? (Please circle one.)

Table 2A: Family Relations - Detailed Analysis

Question	Var.	NC	Mn	SD	SE	TV	Prob
1 I really enjoy my family	Grp 1	10	1.7	.949	.300	3.24	.095
	Grp 2	10	1.5	.527	.167		
2 I wish I was not a part of this family	Grp 1	10	3.9	.994	.314	5.56	.018
	Grp 2	10	4.8	.422	.133		
3 I get along well with this family	Grp 1	10	2.4	1.35	.427		
	Grp 2	10	2.2	.422	.133	10.25	.002
4 My family does not understand me	Grp 1	10	3.0	1.491	.471		
	Grp 2	10	3.3	1.337	.423	1.24	.752
5 There is a lot of love in my family	Grp 1	10	1.8	1.135	.359		
	Grp 2	10	1.2	.422	.133	7.25	.007
6 I feel left out out of my family	Grp 1	10	3.5	1.650	.522		
	Grp 2	10	4.6	.516	.163	10.21	.002
7 I get along well with my father	Grp 1	10	2.9	1.287	.407		
	Grp 2	10	2.7	.949	.300	1.84	.377
8 I dislike my father	Grp 1	10	3.3	1.567	.496		
	Grp 2	10	3.9	1.370	.433	1.31	.696
9 I feel that I can trust my father	Grp 1	10	2.8	1.317	.416		
	Grp 2	10	2.5	1.354	.428	1.06	.935
10 I feel that I do not love my father	Grp 1	10	3.6	1.713	.542		
	Grp 2	10	3.9	1.370	.433	1.56	.517
11 I like being	Grp 1	10	2.7	1.337	.423		

with my father Grp 2 10 2.8 1.229 .389 1.18 .806  
 Table 2A (con.t

Question	Var	NC	Mn	SD	SE	TV	Prob
12 My father is too demanding	Grp 1	10	3.5	1.354	.428		
	Grp 2	10	3.8	1.135	.359	1.42	.608
13 I get along well with my mother	Grp 1	10	2.6	1.265	.400		
	Grp 2	10	1.5	.527	.167	5.76	.016
14 I dislike my mother	Grp 1	10	4.1	1.101	.348		
	Grp 2	10	4.8	.422	.133	6.81	.009
15 I feel that I can trust my mother	Grp 1	10	2.7	1.567	.496		
	Grp 2	10	1.9	1.287	.407	1.48	.566
16 I feel that I do not love my mother	Grp 1	10	4.2	1.033	.327		
	Grp 2	10	4.8	.422	.133	6.00	.014
17 I like being with my mother	Grp 1	10	2.3	.823	.260		
	Grp 2	10	1.8	.632	.200	1.69	.444
18 My mother is too demanding	Grp 1	10	3.4	1.578	.499		
	Grp 2	10	3.3	1.418	.448	1.24	.756

Var=Variables

NC=No. of Cases

Mn=Mean

SD=Standard Deviation

SE=Standard Error

TV=T-Value

Prob=Two-tailed probability

Table 3A - Peer Relations - Detailed Analysis

Question	Var	NC	Mn	SD	SE	TV	Prob
19 I get along well with peers	Grp 1	10	2.50	.850	.269		
	Grp 2	10	1.80	.422	.133	4.06	.049
20 I don't feel like I am a part of this group	Grp 1	10	3.0	1.247	.394		
	Grp 2	10	3.6	1.506	.476	1.46	.584
21 My peers really understand me	Grp 1	10	3.6	.966	.306		
	Grp 2	10	3.0	1.155	.365	1.43	.604
22 I feel like I am disliked by my peers	Grp 1	10	3.8	1.033	.327	1.34	.607
	Grp 2	10	3.9	1.197	.379		
23 I feel like I am an important member of my peer group	Grp 1	10	3.9	1.197	.379	1.00	1.00
	Grp 2	10	1.9	1.197	.379		
24 I wish I were not a part of this group	Grp 1	10	4.0	.667	.211		
	Grp 2	10	3.9	1.197	.379	3.22	.096

Var=Variables

NC=No. of cases

Mn=Mean

SD=Standard deviation

SE=Standard Error

TV=T-Value

Prob=Two-tailed probability

Table 4A: Self-Concept - Detailed Analysis

Question	Var	NC	MN	SD	SE	TV	Prob
25 I feel that people would not like me if they really knew me	Grp 1 Grp 2	10 10	3.8 4.5	1.135 .972	.359 .307	1.36	.651
26 I feel that I am a very competent person	Grp 1 Grp 2	10 10	2.8 1.8	.229 .789	.389 .249	2.43	.202
27 I feel that I need more self confidence	Grp 1 Grp 2	10 10	2.4 2.7	1.075 1.418	.340 .448	1.74	.422
28 I feel that people really like me very much	Grp 1 Grp 2	10 10	2.8 2.4	1.229 1.174	.389 .371	1.10	.893
29 I feel that I get pushed around more than others	Grp 1 Grp 2	10 10	3.4 4.3	1.578 .948	.499 .300	2.77	.146
30 My friends think highly of me	Grp 1 Grp 2	10 10	2.8 2.3	.919 .823	.291 .260	1.25	.74

Var=Variables  
NC=No. of cases  
MN=Mean  
SD=Standard deviation

SE=Standard Error  
TV=T-Value  
Prob=Two-tailed probability

Table 5A: School - Detailed Analysis

Question	Var	NC	MN	SD	SE	TV	Prob
31 I like school	Grp 1	10	1.8	1.476	.467	1.26	.739
	Grp 2	10	2.2	1.217	.416		
32 I don't feel that school is for me	Grp 1	10	3.3	1.630	.517		
	Grp 2	10	4.3	1.059	.335	2.39	.211
33 I get along well with the teacher at school	Grp 1	10	2.8	1.229	.389		
	Grp 2	10	1.6	.843	.267	2.13	.277
34 School is important to me	Grp 1	10	1.9	1.101	.348		
	Grp 2	10	1.7	.675	.213	2.66	.161
35 I do well in school	Grp 1	10	2.6	.699	.221		
	Grp 2	10	2.3	1.252	.396	3.20	.098

Var=Variables

NC=No. of Cases

MN=Mean

SD=Standard Deviation

SE=Standard Error

TV=T-Value

Prob=Two-tailed probability

Table 6A: Coping Skills - Detailed Analysis

Question	Var	NC	MN	SD	SE	TV	Prob
36 I cope well with my problems	Grp 1 Grp 2	10 10	2.8 1.8	1.229 .632	.389 .200	3.78	.061
37 I don't feel that I can resolve any problem that I have	Grp 1 Grp 2	10 10	3.2 3.8	.909 1.317	.291 .416	2.05	.299
38 I feel that I can resolve any problem	Grp 1 Grp 2	10 10	3.3 2.2	.949 1.229	.300 .389	1.68	.452
39 I don't know how to deal with my problems	Grp 1 Grp 2	10 10	3.4 4.4	.966 .699	.306 .221	1.91	.349
40 I need to improve my coping skills	Grp 1 Grp 2	10 10	2.1 2.8	.994 1.549	.314 .490	2.43	.203

Var=Variable

NC=No. of Cases

MN=Mean

SD=Standard Deviation

SE=Standard Error

TV=T=Value

Prob=Two- Tailed Probability